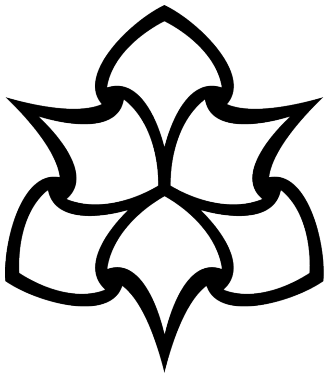

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A philosophical reflection on the "Leuven Scale" and young children's expressions of involvement

Christina MacRae and Liz Jones

Education and Social Research Institute, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the term involvement in relation to children's experiences within early years pedagogy, where it is used as a marker of a quality learning environment. We explore how philosophical enquiry offers ways of thinking more deeply about involvement as a vital quality, and how this prompts us to move beyond universal and progressive child development theories. Our discussion is grounded in the widely used Leuven Scale developed by Ferre Laevers, which we view through the prism of two data examples. The ensuing examination of both data and the scale open an appraisal of the genealogical influences underpinning the scale as well as an opportunity for us to re-read the scale through the vector of Deleuzian philosophy. The paper concludes by speculating what the repercussions might be when philosophy plays a more productive and forceful place within the context of early years education.

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Introduction

This paper explores the potential of involvement as a quality that has particular valance in relation to early childhood pedagogies. In particular it offers a space to think productively about the significance of involvement as a vital quality that is demonstrated by children when they play. Involvement has been foregrounded by Ferre Laevers who has created the Leuven Scale, which is a popular framework that highlights the degrees to which children demonstrate involvement in early education settings. The Leuven Scale has a history that stretches back to the 1980s. However, it has gained increasing purchase in the UK as a 'tool' for practitioners to use when evaluating quality in their settings (see for example; Mathers, Linskey, Seddon, & Sylva, 2007; Woods, 2016). It is used as an observational scale from 1–5, that allows early years practitioners to quantify the degree to which a child is involved in a self-chosen activity. The scale gives descriptors for each level; level 5 denoting the most involvement, and level 1 the least. The scale is based on the premise that higher levels of involvement can be used a measures of higher quality provision.

We open the paper by briefly contextualising the Leuven Scale in relation to early years practice in the UK, before presenting the reader with two short data vignettes based on what could be loosely described as children's play events. The first is drawn from Christina's memory as a parent, whilst the other comes from her current research project, *The Sensory Nursery*, where she has occupied the role of researcher-in-residence for three years in a nursery setting located in the north-west of England. Elsewhere, Christina, has analysed this vignette, as well as many others that form the data set from

CONTACT Christina MacRae c.macrae@mmu.ac.uk Education and Social Research Institute, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, M15 6GX, UK

this slow ethnography project (MacRae, 2019, 2020a, 2020b). In this paper, the two contrasting examples offer a point of departure for a dialogue between the data and using the scale as a method of analysis. It is a conversation that allows us to tug at the scale's underpinnings influenced by both Piaget's learning theory and Gendlin's notion of 'felt sense'. We will explore how these concepts amplify and affirm some theoretical threads that are alive within the scale. We raise questions about the progressive construction of knowledge inherent in the application of a rating system as well as its scientific aspirations. While we recognise that the intention of the scales of involvement is to offer a framework so that an observer can be attuned to the significance of experience as a capacity of learning, we nevertheless feel there are tensions that need to be addressed. Notably, there appears to be a marriage of compromises between a modernist genetic epistemology and a more vitalist philosophy, where intensity within the latter is an expression of an attentional - but not necessarily - intentional body.

This exploration of how the scale makes the two vignettes intelligible allows us to both detect and clarify Piaget's socially inflected, but constructivist, genetic epistemology that underpins the scaling of involvement. We then depart from Piaget's Cartesian cut between mind and body haunting the Leuven Scale to follow a more Deleuzian understanding of process to think more deeply about how movement might be productively (re)cognised as attentional, without being necessarily intentional (conscious). This gives us a space to consider the amorphous quality of *intensity* as being a significant marker of involvement. In tracing why intensity occupies such a significant position we are also obliged to mark out some of the other philosophical underpinnings which Laevers references and these in turn help us to understand the importance that he places on *experience* as being a key site of learning.

Returning once more to the two vignettes, we bring Deleuze back into our conversation so as to appreciate how, in applying the scales, intensity is reduced to serving a technocratic purpose. As such this reduction frames intensity as an *order word* (Deleuze and Guattari, 2007, p. 118 italics added). As MacLure clarifies, an order word is 'disciplinary, both in the sense of commanding obedience and of creating order' (2016, p. 175). This leads us to ask what are the educational costs when experiences such as *intensity* as well as *involvement* become measurement tools for making judgements?

Testing times and the technics of schools readiness

The Leuven Scale simultaneously offers a way to resist the acceleration of educational cultures of testing that are creeping into the policies and practices of early childhood education (Moss, 2016), but at the same time also runs the danger of leaking into professional and policy discourses of school readiness (Bates, 2019) and an associated and incremental culture of 'readiness' technologies that are targeted at dis-advantaged children (Lee, 2019). Our aim is to explore how the scale carries certain assumptions about how children learn and valid forms of knowledge that are underpinned by a cognitive conception of the child. By exploring the ways in which the child is framed when the scale operates as a threshold of visibility, we are interested in ways certain actions are brought into view and others are rendered less legible. While our focus here is to trace the theoretical underpinnings of the scale, we are also aware of the costs of technocratic tools of measurement in relation to the ways that the scale sits within wider neo-liberal discourses about progress and outcomes. Where anxieties concerning 'school readiness' circulate - especially in relation to those young children who are perceived as disadvantaged - diagnostic tools run the danger of being subsumed and normalised as part of the performance of quality (Hunkin, 2018; Kilderry, 2015) in ways that accentuate a surveillance regime over young children (Lee, 2019). In some settings the scale is also being used as a tool to encourage parental engagement with children's learning (Whalley, 2017), a strategy that also runs risks when intersecting with discourses around deficient parenting practices (see Vincent, 2012; Vincent and Maxwell, 2016; Wall, 2010).

Notwithstanding these cautionary notes, with its focus on children's experience(s), the Leuven Scale certainly does offer an alternative to outcomes-based and future-oriented visons of early childhood education. Indeed, it is possible to map the rising interest in using the scale as a staff development tool that

counters ever-narrowing frameworks that purport to measure both 'progress' in ever younger children (Robert-Holmes, 2015), and regulatory frameworks to measure 'quality' in terms of outcomes (Mathers et al., 2007). As such, the scale attunes the early years practitioner to a child's involvement as a measure of quality: the more engaged and absorbed the child is, the deeper and richer their experience will be, and the more complex their thinking. This tuning-in to the child's experience has the effect of cultivating in adults what Laevers describes as an 'empathic understanding' (2015, p. 5) of what it is like to *be* a child. By approaching the scale philosophically, we will argue, that the concept of involvement can also go further to help us to engage more radically with the notion of *becoming* child. Whilst philosophy might be detected or traced in the lineage of the scale, both its implementation and the resulting outcomes are squarely located within a scientific paradigm. As Laevers notes, the results of administering the scale not only 'match the intuitions of many caretakers and teachers' but, they give them a 'scientifically based confirmation of *what they knew already*' (Laevers, 2015, p. 8; emphasis added). We will suggest that if the philosophical tracings that linger around the scale were a more forceful presence then, perhaps they might provide the conduit for telling us *more* than we already know.

A memory, a fieldnote and a conversation with the Leuven Scale

Our first data vignette is based on Christina's memory of her own child who was just walking. The second is a snippet of film data that comes from *The Sensory Nursery* research project where Christina occupied the role of researcher-in-residence. The film data focuses on a period of play between three 2/3 year-old children that occurred in the outdoors area of their nursery. Both these two events reverberate for Christina. For her, they are both moments when a young child's body encounters something in the world, and where this in turn, is registered by a noticing adult. It is this noticing that we wish to carefully attend to. As we go on to argue, such moments have the potential to pierce the 'threshold of visibility' that is calibrated 'by the categorizing gaze that already "knows" what is and is not significant" (MacLure, 2016, p. 180). Drawing on Deleuze, we are interested in exploring how 'objects and settings (milieu) take on an autonomous, material reality' where it is as if 'the action floats in the situation' (Deleuze, 1989). We suggest that it is by immersing ourselves in this milieu, and by attending to the involved bodies of children, we are ourselves might be moved and might suspend our rush for outcomes.

Vignette 1: the toddler and the spinning bracelet (a memory)

> When my child Niki was nearly two years old, I was sitting on the sofa with my Aunt. I was wearing a heavy bangle, which slipped off my arm and fell to the floor where it began to spin. I noticed the spinning bracelet but returned back to talk to my aunt. However, my aunt was totally preoccupied with watching Niki who was just-beginning-to-walk and was positioned next to the spinning bracelet. Niki was slowly rotating his body round and round. My aunt's gaze moved back and forth between the bracelet and child. I recall both of us were surprised. Sue's surprise stemmed from seeing a young child make sense of the moving bracelet. My surprise came from realising that my Aunt had made me notice something about my own child that I would have passed over.

Vignette 2: Running encounters with a garage wall (a written translation of a short slow-motion video clip of 3 children playing outside)

> Sam runs towards the green metal garage. His head and body are covered in a red blanket. He bumps into the side of the garage, making a crashing sound as his body hits the metal. Kim and Adam, who were also running, stop. The red blanket that had been covering Sam is now on the floor. Kim and Adam watch as Sam repeats the action. He runs even faster up to the garage wall and hits it hard with his body. This time the noise is even louder. Adam and Kim join Sam as they too take turns to run towards the wall and crash against it. Sometimes they take turns but on other occasions one will hold back to watch the other two whilst they run and then crash.

While the memory of the infant spinning with the bracelet is an instance of a much younger, solitary child, what is common in both examples is an intense bodily absorption. In both events,

children's bodies respond to material encounters through movement. Previously, Christina, has written in depth about the three children running into the garage wall as an animated dance of attunement (MacRae, 2019). However, there is more about this event that interests her, which is about ways that pedagogical discourses have the effect of governing what can be seen and how it is seen. This is what MacLure describes as a 'threshold of visibility' (2016, p. 180) through which adults make sense of young children's actions. Arguably, it is at this threshold where expectations of what will be seen, and what we register as seen, get entangled. It is this entanglement that leaks into adult bodies and which in turn affects our responses to children. As a researcher-in-residence, Christina attends staff training sessions; these bring with them specific differentials of visibility that aim to (in)form how the early years practitioner might render children's actions intelligible. This further complicates Christina's data analysis: she flounders between her own sense-making, the sense-making of practitioners alongside her, and also the sense-making she is being called into by early years' professional training discourses. The Leuven Scale has been chosen as a lens through which to think more about the two vignettes of children at play because they have been used at one of these staff development workshops.

Returning to the two vignettes, when Christina has shared the joint-spinning of the bracelet/infant anecdote, early years practitioners have generally valued this as a meaning-making event. That is, they make symbolic links between the spinning object and the child's body. However, when Christina has shown the film of the children crashing against the garage wall to practitioners, this has drawn a more mixed response. Some practitioners have expressed a degree of surprise and even horror that the play was allowed to continue and commented that it was a kind of play they would have truncated. This leads Christina to ask: what is it about this particular play-event that causes discomfort in adults? And accompanying this thought she is left wondering whether the process-oriented approaches to early years pedagogy that have become more ubiquitous in staff training workshops might come to her aid in trying to think more deeply about how we make sense of these events as adults. Because of her own background as a teacher, and her immersion in common-sense early years nursery practice, she has turned to Liz, who is removed from the everyday of nursery classrooms, in order to reflect on these questions. As a consequence, Liz comes to the vignettes with a distance that serves as an antidote to Christina's immersion, adding a different dimension to the analysis. As noted, it is the reverberations of the two events, rather than seeking the facts of the matter, that have propelled Christina to embark on this joint project of thinking-together where the ambition is to consider the two events against and within the Leuven Scale.

The Leuven Scale for Involvement

1. **Low Activity:** Activity at this level can be simple, stereotypic, repetitive and passive. The child is absent and displays no energy. There is an absence of cognitive demand. The child characteristically may stare into space. N.B. This may be a sign of inner concentration.
2. **A Frequently Interrupted Activity**: The child is engaged in an activity but half of the observed period includes moments of non-activity, in which the child is not concentrating and is staring into space. There may be frequent interruptions in the child's concentration, but his/her Involvement is not enough to return to the activity.
3. **Mainly Continuous Activity**: The child is busy at an activity but it is at a routine level and the real signals for Involvement are missing. There is some progress but energy is lacking and concentration is at a routine level. The child can be easily distracted.
4. **Continuous Activity with Intense Moments** The child's activity has intense moments during which activities at Level 3 can come to have special meaning. Level 4 is reserved for the kind of activity seen in those intense moments, and can be deduced from the 'Involvement signals. This level of activity is resumed after interruptions. Stimuli, from the surrounding environment, however attractive cannot seduce the child away from the activity.
5. **Sustained Intense Activity**: The child shows continuous and intense activity revealing the greatest Involvement. In the observed period not all the signals for Involvement need be there, but the essential ones must be present: concentration, creativity, energy and persistence. This intensity must be present for almost all the observation period. *(*Ephgrave, 2015*, p.215)*

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Putting the Leuven Scale to work: a conversation

Our next move is to try to make sense of the toddler's spinning, as well as of the three children running repeatedly against the metal garage door, with reference to the Leuven Scale as outlined above. It is the qualities of a felt sensing (of a body that is absorbed in the stuff of the world) and flow (also an expression of a body engaged with the materiality of the world) that Laevers explicitly associates with involvement. Laevers states that when applying the scale, through the act of noticing, our judgements are predicated on an 'act of empathy' [where the observer] 'has to get into the experience of the child, in a sense has to become the child' (Laevers, 2015, p. 3). His guidance further suggests that observational judgements should be based on a two minute snapshot of time. Mimicry and posture are flagged up as possible signs that a child is involved with an 'intense mental activity' and along with this come the associated qualities of concentration, satisfaction, absorption, fascination, motivation, interest (Laevers, 2005, p. 11). These are all qualities that if sustained over the duration of the observation will indicate the highest two levels of involvement. By contrast, at the lower end of the scale, a child may demonstrate passivity, stereotypic and repetitive behaviour, and lack signs of exploration.

When trying to apply the scale to the spinning bracelet and the wall-crashing events, in both cases the children show continuous and intense bodily activity; in the case of the toddler the duration is less than the recommended 2-minute snapshot, and in the case of the wall-crashing the duration is over 5 minutes. When we wonder what level on the involvement scale we should place the children at, we are inclined to place both spells of activity at the highest level. However, when we look at other sections of the scale we become less certain, and judgements are less swiftly made. For example, when we read through the guide together, we ask ourselves whether the moving bodies use the 'full extent of their capabilities', and to what extent does the activity engage their 'imagination'? In the case of the toddler's spinning we might be able to hazard that the rotation of his body is a form of translation of the idea of circularity; that in a sense he is deliberately imitating the spinning bracelet as a form of representational translation. Could this spinning body be perceived from the outside as revealing an internal mental image that is (in)formation? The creation of a concept?

When we come to the three running children, we stutter because it is harder to construe the event as being orientated towards meaning-making. The actions here appear to be repeated for the bodily pleasure of the encounter, where the fast-moving body makes dynamic contact with a sheet of metal that answers the children's bodies with a vibrating sonic crash. Given that the children co-

ordinate their run ups, and sometimes wait for each other before starting their new trajectory, we wonder whether this is an expression of shared pleasure and conviviality. But then, when we return to the scales it does not appear that the children are working at the limits of, what is referred to in the scale as, cognitive demand. In the case of Sam and Kim, Christina knows from experience that they often play together and that they are well versed in turn-taking. However, her knowledge of Adam predisposes her to appreciate that this non-verbal interaction affords him a way to co-produce his actions with other children – something that he often seeks to do but is usually unsuccessful at. Does this mean, therefore, that in terms of his social development we might place Adam as a 5, whilst Sam and Kim might be marginally lower so as to reflect 'the fact' that they were not really working at the limits of their social capacities? By applying the notion of play that is operating at the *limit* of a child's capacity we are led to place Sam and Kim at a lower level. This has the effect of judging their play as regressive, since we are aware that they are often capable of sustaining more demanding group play. At the same it individualises and separates out the capacities of each child in what is a collectively experienced play event.

Another question also interrupts our application of the scale in relation to quantifying the quality of involvement. In the case of both play events the activity that so absorbed the children was brought forth by an accidental material encounter. This means that what happened preceding the encounter may well have been a moment of inattention, rather than intentional activity that was initiated with a purpose. We now feel quite unsure how the poles of distraction and concentration can be placed as binary opposites. According to the scale, the term 'aim-less' is given as indicating a lack of involvement, and so is placed as the bottom level. This implies that the opposite of aim-less, is goal-oriented. However, in the case of both play events that we are trying to analyse, the trigger for the 'strong forces' of motivation seemingly welled up from a *chance* encounter, rather than directed by intent.

We pause to reflect further. We notice that the scale works at drawing the adults' attention to a 'something' about the child that *signals* to the adult that they are fully involved, and that in so doing, the scale also works on adult bodies so as to pick up signals from children. So, where a child's activity is seen as falling lower on the scale, a practitioner might then be more inclined to interact with them so as to re-direct them to move their play 'up' to a more challenging level. As a signal to the adult, we wonder how the scale might have the effect of working viscerally where our bodies are called into action thus affecting our intuitive responses to children's play. For example, could the toddler's spinning signal that something conceptually significant was occurring? Could the crashing bodies of the children signal at a gut level aimless and regressive actions thus demanding adult intervention? In order to grapple with these tensions and categorical stutterings, we feel the need to trace how the Leuven Scale adds to Piaget's constructivism using the quality of *involvement* as a central figure.

The intensity of involvement

Some of the tension that we encounter as we try to put the Leuven Scale to work on our two vignettes is that *how* children demonstrate the intensity of their involvement is explicit in the guidance (the lowest rating given where 'no energy' is evidenced, and the highest is marked by 'continuous intense activity'), but, *what* this demonstrates is more implicit. The main clue that we have to this is in the wording of level 1 of the scale, indicating that the less intense the experience, the less *cognitively* engaged the child is. In order to understand why intense activity is correlated with cognitive demand and capability we need to spend a little time exploring some of the philosophical genealogy behind this pedagogic scale of involvement.

Laevers brings Gendlin's (2004) notion of 'felt sense' and 'intuition', as a way to expand on Piaget's vision of the child as 'a little scientist' (constructing knowledge about the material world through interactions with this matter). It is the way that felt sense plays an active part in

knowledge formation, that makes for a more 'dynamic' interpretation of constructivism (Laevers, 1998, p. 74). Thus, sensory-motor action is enlivened by emphasising the felt aspect of a child's contact with the world, and intensity of feeling becomes the dynamic force behind a more (eco)-logical 'discovery' of the world. This interpretation of constructivism is further animated by what Laevers refers to as 'strong forces', or 'urges', that drive experiential learning. Here Laevers draws on the work Csikszentmihalyi (1979) and the idea of flow – where flow describes an optimal mental state of engagement. Marrying the cognitive constructivism of Piaget with the social constructivism of Vygotsky, Laevers characterises flow as inherently propelling the child/learner to work at the limit of their capabilities (Laevers, 1998, p. 84). This assumption of progressive development shares continuity with the emphasis of mind over matter in Piaget's cognitive process where assimilation and accommodation generate increasingly complex conceptual schema. Cognition always moves in one direction as the limits of schematic concepts are reached: it is a direction of travel that moves from simple to complex. In contrast to Piaget, however, Laevers gives more prominence to an amorphous sense of intensity as an engendering force and as a place of deep knowing. This quality of on-going-ness and continual change can be more readily detected in Piaget's later thought where knowledge is less delineated and step-like. Piaget describes this in more dynamic terms as 'a perpetual construction made by exchanges between the organism and the environment, from the biological point of view, and between thought and its object from the cognitive point of view' (Piaget quoted in Gauntlett, 2007, p. 130).

While Gendlin's idea of felt sense influences Laevers, there is an unresolved tension where Laevers talks about this knowledge process as, not only one that constructs mental representations (1998, p. 81), but one that is also *driven* by mental representations. The Leuven Scale reflects this marriage of Gendlin's felt and bodied knowing with Piaget's emphasis on the cognitive. Knowledge is arrived at through a process of bodily engagements with objects: 'The laws of nature and psychological insights have to be discovered bit by bit in a process requiring an extreme openness to what natural and psychological phenomena have to tell us' (Laevers, 1998, p. 74). Here, body action is schematically and mentally assimilated. Repeated schematic action results in cognitive accommodations of knowledge, motivating a more complex mind to pursue more complex problems.

Returning to the spinning child and bracelet: the body responds by rotating with the bracelet so that rotation is both discovered and created. Thus 'through the residue of countless concrete actions' (1998, p. 83), the senses are engaged, and rotation, becomes assimilated as a mental image. The scheme of rotation becomes sedimented progressively through time as an absolute concept through bodily activity. Laevers might also say that it now resides in the body both at an intuitive level, and conceptually as a schema that can be brought to mind. The body, driven by the need for cognitive demand will then seek a new stimulus, spurred on by an exploratory drive that is always seeking more complex and intense mental activity (Laevers, 2005, p. 27). This is a self-organising system that naturally aligns 'involvement' (as an expression of mental engagement) with complexity of knowledge. The importance of progressive cognitive demand is critical because 'only after the consolidation of the acquired competence does openness to the new kinds of stimuli arise' (Laevers 1998, p. 84). The self-organisation of this system could also be aligned to Bateson's 'ecology of mind' – a system where form is extracted from substance (2000). What moves the body in its material engagement with the world is the unidirectional force of a *mind* that continually seeks abstraction. This is a bodily knowing that is at once, both *attentional*, as well as *intentional*. In the case of the rotating toddler, and guided by the Leuven Scale, it is possible to perceive the experience of spinning as a process of (in)formation through which a concept is created. However, when applying the scale in the case of the running children, we continue to have difficulty in translating their actions in terms of cognitive demand and concept formation. Once again, the effect of the scale causes us to hesitate and, we are unable to place them at the top end of the involvement scale. But does this mean that the

intensity and flow of their bodies, where they appear to be lost in the experience, has to be ignored and thus discounted?

In order to rescue the wall-crashing from being perceived as unproductive, we need to continue to think more about the involvement of children's bodies and the part played by sensation in these encounters. We want push even further in the direction of a radical philosophy of empiricism, one that places 'the feeling body as the storm centre of a world of pure experience' (Livingston, 2012). Here felt sense is not only subjectively felt, but it is always in relation to and bound up with matter as sensed. In drawing on such a theoretical approach, force does not only emanate from the subject, expressed as a kind of cognitive will, but rather is expressed as an unconscious 'incorporeal will *of the* body' (original emphasis, Dyke, 2013, p. 152). We want to challenge the idea that **'**the mind attends the body distracts' (Ingold, 2017, p. 19). We therefore wish to consider how a philosophy of 'incorporeal materialism' (Massumi, 2002, p. 16) might help us to think more deeply about the intensity of the *felt* dimension that both Gendlin and Laevers allude to.

Intensity as a philosophical opening: the distracted body and the production of sense

At this point we follow other scholars (Olsson, 2009; Hickey-Moody 2013), to ask what would be the potential repercussions if the field of early years education took seriously Deleuzian philosophy? How might Deleuzian philosophy help augment the 'processural continuity' and 'qualitative growth' (Massumi 2002, p. 12) that we recognise as key qualities in the identification of 'involvement'? Working positively with the concept of involvement as a philosophical provocation, we will return to the notion of intensity, and how this might help us to think more deeply about experiential learning. At the same time, we also want to explore a point raised by Deleuze; that the problem with dominant models of constructivism is not that they are *too* abstract, but that they are 'not abstract enough to grasp the real incorporeality of the concrete' (Massumi, 2002, p. 4). We deliberately adopt an expansive approach, rather than one that is a corrective, where we work productively with Laevers' work on involvement, in the hope of bringing 'wonder back into them' (Massumi 2002, p. 7). By complicating the figure of abstract thought, we raise questions about the notion of the material as an object of thought. We realise that complicating the Leuven Scale runs the risk of antagonising those who call for clarity and pragmatic exposition, but we argue that a more vitalist philosophy when aligned with child development has the potential to contribute to the field of early childhood education in an era of accountability.

Massumi suggests that it might be more helpful to use the word 'productivism' (2002, p. 12) over constructivism. Like Gendlin, whose organic idea of *carrying-forward* (2004) expresses the significance of continual processual movement, Deleuze (along with many others including Massumi 2002; Ingold 2017; Olsson, 2009; Manning, 2016) emphasises both the foundational quality of movement; both as a force in the world, as well as being an expression of attention. Departing from Gendlin, however, these writers suggest that what makes the body move is not necessarily directed by the subject. Massumi helps us to expand on Laevers' notion of force by radically distributing it beyond the subject, and in relation to sensing matter. The challenge of theorising this dynamic quality of sensation (expressed as force) is that it cannot be seen. It is in Massumi's words, 'infraempirical' (2002, p. 160). It might be helpful here to explore an example that Laevers makes when he illustrates the quality of felt sense using the example of when a child goes pale in response to a door slamming caused by a draught from an open window (1998, p. 74). The example is provided in order to distinguish between the child's mental capabilities to foresee that the door will slam as learnt knowledge, with the felt shock that is registered by the body when the door slams. Here logical deduction (based on watching things fall over many times) gives rise to prediction that the door will slam, but this knowing (understanding

the laws of physics) is different from the autonomous felt shock that causes the body to startle and skin to pale.

Massumi's notion of the infra-empirical complicates the neat distinction that Laevers makes between a mind predicting the door slamming, with the body-shock that registers when it does. According to Masumi, it is also possible that the child's awareness of the open door in combination with the feel of the breeze on their body, might result in a felt sensation that anticipates the door's slam, and is registered at an incorporeal but bodily level (although the child may yet register shock when the sound does indeed come). The child's body, the door and the breeze, might be better understood as what Massumi calls a 'felt reality of a relation' (2002, p. 16). What can be so challenging is how this feeling that unfolds in a dynamic relation-to-matter, is often not sufficiently 'large' enough to register consciously (ibid). Rather than foregrounding a subjective capability that reasonably predicts cause and effect, this (re)cognition of felt sense gives greater value to a visceral anticipatory potential of an ideality that is latent at a bodily level, rather than extracted by a conscious mind (Massumi, 2002, p. 89).

While the jolt of a startled body when a door slams is, in Massumi's words, 'punctual' (2002, p. 36) and shocking, in the case of a body rotating in response to the bracelet, the registration takes places more co-terminously. What unites both these events is the quality of continuity, an on-goingness where matter continues to resonate through and with the body. Similarly, the initial encounter of Sam's body as it bumps into the garage side is another attentional shock as sheet-metal registers with body. It is an impact that results in more movement as his body responds by re-engaging with the wall in a repeat body-slam. It is perhaps when the body is least intentional that there is the greatest possibility for intensity, as well as creative potential. In both cases bodies are responsive to a material encounter. Even in the encounter, an already attentive body might be redirected: 'our attention can, as we say, be caught or captivated, pulled in one direction or another, or sometimes in several directions at once' (Ingold, 2017, p. 19). It is the intensity of sensation in a tending body, rather than an (in)tending mind, that seems to be the driving force at play here.

It might be helpful to remember here that Laevers hoped that the use of his scale would assist us to try to 'be' like a child in order to better appreciate the quality of intensity that is characteristic of involvement. One way to do this might be to try to slam one's body against a wall repeatedly, actions that recall the artist Bruce Nauman's performance piece entitled 'Wall Pressure'. This was later re-performed by Marina Abramovic, who with great force pushed her body against a glass wall at five-minute intervals over 7 h (Watanabe, 2005). While this may produce an intense involvement and heightened sensation, perhaps similar to that experienced by the three children, this too seems insufficient to evoke the improvisatory way that the three children's attention was caught by the wall, and the following wave-like rises and falls of attention and alignment between the children and the wall. While Abramovic follows Nauman's instructions, the three children's intense and attentional slamming responds, not through will or effort, but rather in state of submersion where bodies are called into action through material encounters.

Perhaps we could now follow Hickey-Moody's suggestion that Deleuze and Guattari's notion of *becoming-child* might helpfully dislocate 'childhood from psychological conceptual models and teleological regimes' (2013, p. 284). The notion of becoming-child is emphatically not a becoming that is oriented developmentally towards adulthood, but rather a figuration of childhood that sees potential in the intensities of children's doings, in terms of the capacity to affect and be affected (ibid, 282) which produces change both in positive as well as negative terms. Drawing on the concept of nomadism Deleuze conjures childhood as an affective space where different lines of flight are opportunities for experimentation, finding new connections and directions, open to change, continually being made, unmade, and remade. Childhood is presented as a field of intensities without predetermined categories of identity and experience where hierarchical power and social norms are revised so that power flows in both directions, from part to

whole and whole to part (Kennedy, 2013, p. 147). Becoming child eschews the idea of a stable being; rather the child *emerges* from the self- organising capacities of organic and non-organic materials to co-create novel formations (Lester, 2020).

Whilst we heed Hickey-Moody's caution about the dangers of romanticising the figure of the becoming-child, Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of becoming-child does offer us a place where the capacity to be affected in childhood is taken as a generative, rather than a less evolved, mode of knowledge production. When Laevers invites us to try to be like a child through attuning ourselves to their worldly involvements, he too is hoping that this will allow us to productively recognise the integrity of children's ways of knowing the world as gauged by the intensity that their bodies demonstrate. However, because Piaget's evolutionary epistemology also haunts his scale of involvement, progress is always implied through serial points from simple to complex, where mind triumphs over matter. In contrast, Deleuze and Guattari contend that 'to become is not to progress or regress along a series of line' (2007, p. 262).

Intensity, involution and sensation

For Deleuze and Guattari the intensity of involvement is the capacity to be moved by something, and, as they make clear, it is a capacity that does not *evolve* by degree. Rather, they counter the hierarchical trajectory of evolution with the term 'involution' – from which the word involvement comes (2007, p. 263). In involvement's etymological roots we see its Middle English origins: 'enfold' and 'entangle'; as well as its Latin origins in *involvere*, where *in* is 'into' and *volvere* is 'to roll'. The emphasis here is on a relationship of contact with the world where sensation becomes a folding-in of matter:

> The question is now about bodies taken in their undifferentiated depth and in their measureless pulsation. This depth acts in an original way, by means of its power to organize surfaces and envelop itself within surfaces. (Deleuze, 1990, p. 142)

While the receptivity of our bodies as this 'sensory surface' is reduced in adulthood through the subjection of a body to an over-coded, already signified world, it is nevertheless still present at the level of the everyday – even though as adults we are not always conscious of it (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p. 284). This also recalls Deleuze's idea of becoming-child, where a sensory becoming plays out in what are often minor events, triggered by the smallest of things and in unexpected ways.

Instead of assuming that spinning is an imitation through imagination, what happens if we now return to the event where the toddler rotates in unison with the bracelet with an alternative notion of sensory becoming? We suggest that involvement might be a form of a latent ideality, produced through sensation as a toddler-body feels itself through spinning, and in this motion *becomes bracelet*. This is a body that feels itself differently with and through motion and matter. This body's senses of proprioception express 'kinship' through a connection at an ideational level with the felt movement of the bracelet. It is the involvement of the bracelet in the production of a concept marks where Deleuze and Guattari open up and extend both intensity and involvement beyond a narrow sense of the cognitive as constructed by an intentional mind.

Returning to the 5-point Leuven scale, there are dangers in corralling what Laevers calls strong forces (and Deleuze calls intensities) into a series of points within a narrative of progress and where 'children are asset-stripped for their conceptual value at the expense of engagement with the material conditions of their lives' (MacLure, 2016, p. 179). We create ahead of ourselves a 'catagorising gaze that already 'knows' what is and what is not significant' by way of a progressive developmental path that leads to a mind that 'can be freed to go about its business in Cartesian autonomy' (ibid, p. 180). While we accept that Laevers' attempt to pin down intensity is aimed at attuning adults to the doings and productions of children, there is a danger that once framed for technocratic purposes as a 'scale', it functions in the same disciplinary way as

what Deleuze refers to as an 'order-word' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2007, p. 120). A vertically ordered scale runs the danger colonising childhood by imposing interpretations of behaviour as scientific truths. They also run the risk in reinstating an understanding of child development as unilinear and progressive (Cannella and Viruru, 2004; MacRae 2020a).

Propositions for attentional practices

In this concluding section our aim is to affirm both the significance of intensity and involvement in relation to pedagogy that Laevers insists on, as well as to re-affirm the importance that he places on the role of the attentional pedagogue. However, we propose that the scale itself operates to position the practitioner as looking at the child from a certain distance, and this leads us to speculate about other ways to develop attentional pedagogies. Returning to the concepts of proximity and distance that were raised earlier in the discussion about Deleuze's notion of becoming-child, we suggest that the concept of involvement and its filiation with the term involution (as opposed to evolution) might help to re-position the practitioner. We wonder what the possibilities are for opening up events, of which the two play episodes are examples, so as to resist formation for long enough to allow us to actualise different versions of reality that resist judgement by decree. We also wonder what the effects might be if we speculate about ways that becoming-child could be extended in relation to our adult-selves. Rather than be positioned externally, where we are governed by the spurious notion that we can have a god's eye view of an event, we ask, what would happen if we developed attentional strategies for becoming more involved ourselves.

Exploring the concept of involvement has allowed us to focus on ways that bodies can be collectively attentional with both human and non-human others. It has raised the possibility that not all learning is intentional, and it has suggested that concepts can reside outside what we usually think of as representational thought. As a concept, involvement, when applied to the bracelet and the garage wall events, permitted a (re)cognition of a distributed intensity that traverses humans and non-humans. If it is through our own experiencing bodies that we become involved with other bodies, then it is our ability to participate rather than to extrapolate that becomes more productive in terms of thinking beyond *what we already know*. If, as adults in the company of children, we think about the potential of involvement, then it could be implicated in our capacities to 'listen' to what children's bodies are telling us in more emergent ways (Davies, 2014). Instead of producing instructions for better seeing, it might be productive to focus on ways to place ourselves, more responsively, in the middle of our own experience.

We suggest that the act of filming, and particularly of (re)viewing film in slow-motion may have the potential to engender attentional pedagogies. It may be recalled that it was the act of viewing the children throwing themselves against the garage wall in slow-motion that caught Christina's attention in the first place. Also, when others have viewed the film it has caused surprise. The slow-motion amplification of the force of the bodies hitting the wall has discomforted some viewers, while others were intrigued. While we have cautioned against observation at a distance, observation itself is an active doing that demands involvement. Altering the speed of the event, in this instance, highlighted the responsive bodies of children, as well as setting off a bodily response in the viewing adults. We suggest that it was the compilation of bodies, matter, sound and movement that disturbed our usual viewings and which cut across 'what we already know'. Our sense is that when watching the slowed film of the children slamming their bodies against the garage wall, as adults, we were momentarily directed towards what Wargo describes as 'the relational assemblages of people/objects/practices/materials' (2018, p. 9). Slow-motion film as a (re)viewing method is less to do with representing reality or data to be themed and interpreted, 'but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality (Deleuze and

Guattari, 2007, p. 157). Experimenting with film like this could offer one way to generate curious pedagogic practices.

Along with Laevers, we would like to call for pedagogies that are focussed on enlarging the capacities of adults to become attuned to involvement and intensity: ones that address the challenge of activating 'more mobile ways of paying attention to process rather than products, to pursue life-lines rather than points' (Lester, 2020, p. 86). We worry, that the Leuven Scale brings with it some countervailing forces, where adults might see children as lacking when it appears that they are falling at the low end of the scale and that this, in turn, can lead to well-intentioned interventions that are underpinned by notions of linear progress. Echoing Lester, this leads us to call for a greater emphasis on the 'inter-connected process of adult account-ability and response-ability', (2020, p. 171), and the need to think more deeply about how adults take note of children's play, as well as how this noticing might produce response-able ways of answering children as they play. Given the improvisational qualities of the play events that we have centred our writing on here, we also speculate about ways as adults we can be more generous in our responses to children's play. We therefore invoke improvisation as a potential technique of involvement that adults could themselves explore. At the same time, we also recognise that improvised practice is always carried out in what Butler calls a 'scene of constraint' (2004). In particular early years settings are heavily inscribed as a field of constraint because they are so saturated by developmental discourse that categorises what is normal (Burman, 2017). But despite such constraints we nevertheless suggest that inventing techniques for adult involvement, such as slow-motion film and improvisation, might offer playful ways for the capacities of our (adult) bodies to be more receptive to the involved movements of others – both human and non-human. We also suggest that the philosophy of Deleuze can help us to reconsider ways of watching, being and thinking with children where something happens. This 'something' is knowledge and importantly it will be knowledge that we didn't already know.

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Notes on contributors

Christina MacRae is a Research Fellow at Manchester Metropolitan University whose interests lie in early childhood care and education. She has a particular interest in the way that sensation, affect and movement express a bodily relationship engagement with the world. "The Sensory Nursery" is a recent ethnographic project, where Christina was a 'researcher-in-residence' and carried out collaborative research in a nursery class for 2-year olds, negotiated with the nursery and with internal funding from Manchester Met.

Liz Jones is an Emeritus Professor attached to the Education and Social Research Institute at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her relatively recent interst in posthumanism and feminist new materialisms is allowing her to both consider and question what some of the repercussions are when 'the child" and 'childhood' are understood as always becoming within the intra-actions of ordinary daily life.

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